

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 COME-00
EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 IO-13 HA-05 OMB-01
TRSE-00 AID-05 PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 CU-04 ACDA-12 PC-01 MCT-01 CCO-00
FBOE-00 OC-06 OPR-02 USSS-00 CA-01 A-01 SCS-06
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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9768
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0710

PARIS AND BRUSSELS FOR LABATT

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM PGOV TS ELAB
SUBJ: SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LEADER MESTIRI HOLD PRESS
CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY. SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LEADER AHMED MISTIRI
HELD CONFERENCE WITH FOREIGN PRESS AT HIS HOUSE SUNDAY
AFTERNOON. MESTIRI CLAIMED THAT NUMBER OF PERSONS KILLED
ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT FIGURES. HE STRONGLY CRITICIZED
GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH RESULTED IN
EXCESSIVE LOSS OF LIFE, CALLED FOR RELEASE OF UGTT
LEADERS NOW UNDER ARREST, AND DEMANDED FORMATION OF
NATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO INVESTIGATE CAUSES FOR
TROUBLES AND TO DETERMINE PERSONS RESPONSIBLE. END SUMMARY.
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MESTIRI CALLED IMPROMPTU CONFERENCE WITH REPRESENTATIVES
OF FOREIGN PRESS AT HIS HOME LATE SUNDAY AFTERNOON.
MESTIRI'S STATEMENT, WHICH WAS STRONGLY CRITICAL OF
GOVERNMENT, IS SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

3. NUMBER OF DEAD IS MUCH HIGHER THAN AUTHORITIES HAVE

ANNOUNCED, AND IS MOUNTING AMONG WOUNDED. SITUATION IS CRITICAL AND TUNISIA HAS NOT FACED SUCH DANGER SINCE INDEPENDENCE. SOCIAL DEMOCRAT MOVEMENT HAD FORESEEN THIS BUT AUTHORITIES IGNORED SONGS.

4. GOVERNMENT EVIDENTLY DID NOT LEARN ANY LESSONS FROM VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED AT KSAR HELAL, SOUSSE, SFAX, GAFSA, BEJA AND MATEUR. IT REPLIED WITH PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS WHICH SERVED ONLY TO ADD TO TENSIONS AND EXCITE PASSIONS.

5. SOCIAL DEMOCRATS LAST WEEK MADE ONE LAST EFFORT TO CHECK DETERIORATION OF SITUATION. ON TUESDAY, JAN 24, DELEGATION COMPOSED OF MESTIRI, HASSIB BEN AMMAR AND BEJI CAID ESSEBSI SOUGHT UNSUCCESSFULLY TO SEE THE PRESIDENT. GROUP WAS RECEIVED, HOWEVER BY PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND AFTERWARDS IT CALLED ON UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL. GROUP EXPLAINED ITS CONCERN TO BOTH SIDES, EACH OF WHICH BLAMED THE OTHER FOR THE CRISES. UGTT ACCEPTED PROPOSAL THAT ESSENTIAL SERVICES (ELECTRICITY, GAS AND HOSPITALS) SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AND THAT NO PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION WOULD TAKE PLACE ON JAN 24. EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE INDICATE POLITICAL FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT AS IT WAS UNABLE EITHER TO FORESEE OR TO AVOID THE SITUATION IN WHICH COUNTRY FINDS ITSELF TODAY. MOST OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE WERE COMMITTED BY YOUTHS 15 TO 20 YEARS OLD. THEIR BEHAVIOR REPRESENTS REJECTION OF SOCIETY IN
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WHICH THEY SEE NO ROLE FOR THEMSELVES. A VERITABLE POPULAR REVOLT HAS UNFOLDED.

6. REGIME DID NOTHING TO AVOID CONFRONTATION AND PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAD ACTUALLY AGREED ON "TRAIL OF STRENGTH" WITH UGTT WEEKS AGO. AUTHORITIES ARE GUILTY OF HAVING RESORTED TO ARMS TOO QUICKLY AND TOO MASSIVELY. BLOODBATH WAS RESULT. IT IS NOW FEARED EVENTS WILL BE USED AS PRETEXT BY HARDLINERS TO IMPOSE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME. SITUATION IS GRAVE AND IT IS SURPRISING THAT NEITHER PRESIDENT NOR PRIME MINISTER HAS SEEN FIT TO ADDRESS PEOPLE.

7. MESTIRI CONCLUDED BY CALLING FOR:

- LAY DOWN ARMS AND RETURN OF TROOPS TO BARRACKS
- ENDING OF STATE OF EMERGENCY
- CESSATION OF HATE CAMPAIGN ON TV AND RADIO
- RELEASE OF ARRESTED UGTT OFFICIALS
- ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO ASSESS CAUSES AND DETERMINE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH PARTY.

8. COMMENT: WHETHER OR NOT NUMBER OF DEAD ANNOUNCED

BYT GOT IS ACCURATE, FIGURE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MOUNT.
GOVERNMENT HAS ADMITTED 325 WOUNDED, AND SOME OF THESE
HAVE CERTAINLY ALREADY DIED AND OTHERS WILL. NON-TUNISIAN
DOCTOR CLOSE TO EMBASSY HAS ESTIMATED DEATH TOLL NOW
AT 70.
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